

Creating a new Corporate
Visual Identity at the
University of Lincoln Library
Developing a new visual identity for the new Library

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Corporate Visual Identity (CVI) is an important part of the identity of any organisation, it plays a significant role in how an organisation presents itself to its stakeholders. The main elements of a CVI are corporate name, logo, colour palette and font typeⁱ, basically a corporate rule book that everyone in the organisation uses to achieve a consistent identity. Academic libraries have not traditionally been recognised for creating their own visual identity, but that is beginning to change with some very dynamic new builds requiring their own brand, image and identity.

In 2004 the University of Lincoln renovated a disused warehouse to create a new university library. This project enabled the Library and Learning Resources (LLR) department to create a new CVI. The department has its own marketing group whose remit was to look after the marketing and publicity needs of LLR and to work with the estate department to create the corporate identity of the new library. This was to be housed in a converted Victorian goods and grains warehouse. The Great Central Warehouse was built in 1907 and has been described by the local council as a 'spectacular survivor' from the 1900s.

Colour Palette

The building's historical character has been fully retained with the original beams and brickwork left exposed. It was the exposed brickwork that gave LLR our new corporate colour palette, a deep brick red to complement the bricks. The original steel girders gave us our second corporate colour, a deep grey. The final colour in the palette was a soft cream to bring the red and grey together. The colours were an important part of the new image for the library, we were moving from being a learning resource centre back to a university library. We wanted colours that had connotations of tradition, learning and history, think Farrow and Ballⁱⁱ



Font Type

Choosing the font type for the new library was interesting as we had to take into account all our stakeholders. The research that we did showed that most university libraries use Helvetica, however we all preferred Gill Sans which is from the same font family. We also had to look into the size of the menu boards, there is a simple formula for determining the optimum appropriate height of lettersⁱⁱⁱ on signage, based on the distance at which the sign is intended to be read.

The formula is: Optimum height of letters (mm) = distance (m) / 250

For example, if we wanted our signs to be visible from 5m away, that would give an optimum text height of 20mm.

The building

With the colour palette and font decided the next step was to apply this imaginatively and creatively in the building. The architect had expressed the idea of using all the colours on the large stairwell. The stairs, doors and window frames were all painted grey, the walls were cream and the text was dark red, the effect was striking and contemporary. The conversion of the old warehouse is phase one of the new library, the stairwell will connect to a very modern building in the future, so they decided to blend the traditional colours with a modern look.

Signage

The LLR marketing group was asked to provide the architects with the design brief for the signs. The brief stated that the signage must be user friendly, consistent and professional. The group identified the three types of signage required:

1. Orientation

These signs are to present the physical layout of the building and help users find their way around, usually maps or directories. A directory of services was required at each entrance and on each floor. These menu boards were designed in the corporate colour palette, the colour was reversed to highlight current location and text was kept to a minimum.



2. Identification

These signs identify places, functions, services and resources, for example library desk, self issue etc. These were also in the grey and cream, the red was kept to a minimum to be more effective when it was used.

3. Directional

These signs guide people to areas or services within the library. They are located in entrances, stairwells and along major pathways within the floors. They usually use an arrow and make use of other symbols. The dark red was used for these signs.



Shelving

The colour palette was also used for the shelving, we alternated the colour of the ends between grey and cream on each floor.

Publications

Having decided on the colour palette and font the marketing group was able to write a list of guidelines for publications. We developed templates that used the new corporate colours and font, they were consistent and uniform. We were keen to move away from clip art and in house publications to a more professional corporate look. At last, we had visual consistency, we discarded all the old guides and replaced them with new ones. The new library also had fewer notice boards for the students to clutter so it looked good as well.

Launch Event

The marketing group decided the best way to introduce the academics to the new library was to hold a special staff event. With the support from Ottakars bookstore and advice from our subject librarians, we organised an event and invited representatives from publishers that covered relevant subjects. The representatives were invited to bring new publications and stock items for academics and library staff to view. A few publishers also sent editorial staff to discuss commissioning new books. Database providers were asked to demonstrate their products; a number used this opportunity to provide training sessions to library and academic staff. We asked the suppliers to provide a small amount of sponsorship towards the costs of this event, and most of them were willing to do so. We used the sponsorship that we raised to buy the refreshments for the event, and also to pay for promotional items such as bookmarks.



What has happened since?

It has been almost two years since we opened the new library, but it still looks really good. We have hosted numerous events at the library including one UCRG event that took one hour to tour the building as so many questions were asked! We have won 2 Royal Institute of Chartered Surveyors (RICS) awards (silver and gold), and a gold Royal Institute of British Architects (RIBA) award. The publications are still consistent although we have to keep our eye on them as some still use the old template! We are now looking forward to the planned phase two due in 2007.

ⁱ Annette L M van den Bosch et al. 2006. Managing corporate visual identity. *Journal of business communication*, 43 (2) 138-157

ⁱⁱ Manufacturers of traditional paint and wallpaper - <http://www.farrow-ball.com/>

ⁱⁱⁱ The UK Department of Transport - http://www.dft.gov.uk/stellent/groups/dft_mobility/documents/page/dft_mobility_503282-10.hcsp